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ABSTRACT

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) provides materials and services in the areas of agriculture, chemistry, biology, and law to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Washington and its installations throughout the country, to land-grant universities, and to the world agricultural community. Information is disseminated through on-line computer networks, printed bibliographies, reference services, loans, and photocopies. NAL goals for the next five years are: (1) to coordinate USDA, national, and international agricultural information activities; (2) to create information networks; and (3) to improve services in order effectively to backstop national agricultural information needs. (LS)

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THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY MOVING AHEAD

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During the hearings on the National Agricultural Library (NAL) budget before the Subcommittee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives last spring, a question was asked that might easily have come from any one of you. Representative John T. Myers of Indiana asked, "It would seem -- here again this decision has already been made, with the new building here at Beltsville -- but it would seem it might have been advisable at one point to make a Department of Agriculture or a section for agriculture in the Library of Congress (LC), rather than building separate facilities. Would it have been more economical and maybe even more beneficial to have done that?"

My reply was the standard one we give to the many persons who believe that NAL is, in fact, a part of the Library of Congress. LC is in the Legislative Branch. NAL is the Executive Branch. LC's prime user is the Congress. NAL's prime user is the USDA research scientist. I added that with all due credit to LC, I doubted that agricultural library service would have developed to its present level under that kind of arrangement. Representative Myers replied, "I guess you would have to say that now."

Paper presented at the American Library Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois. July 18, 1976.

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Earlier this year, we were taking a group of library interns through the NAL building. One of these young people, who had come prepared, commented, "It must be nice to be in the Executive Branch. You do not have to worry about budgets." I found this misunderstanding very amusing. I hastened to explain that as a USDA agency, NAL follows the same budget processes as the Forest Service, the Agricultural Research Service, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Extension Service. And while NAL is low on the budget totem pole, your elected representatives have no hesitation in trimming us down to size.

NAL was designated a "national" library in 1962, after a long history as the Library of the Department of Agriculture. Although that was almost 14 years ago, and much progress has been made, there is still some distance to go before NAL becomes a truly national library.

The National Agricultural Library, in cooperation with the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine (NLM), provides coverage and servicing of worldwide publications in the agricultural, chemical, and biological sciences. It serves all of the Department programs in the Washington metropolitan area, as well as the field installations throughout the country. It has the added responsibility of service to the land-grant universities, and the world agricultural science community.

The Library's prime purpose is to acquire, preserve, and disseminate an exhaustive collection of reliable information in all phases of the agricultural and allied sciences: botany, chemistry, animal industry and veterinary medicine, biology including marine biology, agricultural engineering, rural development and sociology, forestry, entomology, food and nutrition, agricultural ecology, oceanography, soils and fertilizers, and the marketing, transportation, and other aspects of agricultural products. NAL also maintains, in cooperation with the Office of General Counsel, a central law library and 17 field legal libraries. One of the important functions of the Law Library is to provide histories of all laws pertaining to the work of the Department.

Information contained in the agricultural literature is disseminated through on-line computer networks, printed bibliographies, personal reference service, loans and photocopies to agricultural colleges, research institutions, government agencies, agricultural associations, industry, individual scientists, farmers, and the general public in every part of the world.

We have just completed an exercise in asking ourselves where NAL should be five years from now. This resulted in some 40 objectives for improving internal, traditional library services. Five broad goals affecting service on a national and international scale were also identified. These goals deal primarily with the expansion and coordination

of technical information services not only to researchers, but to administrators and managers as well. The latter group, relatively overlooked, increasingly requires the support of library services in planning effective national services.

A primary goal is to become a focal point within the Department of Agriculture for coordinating departmental information activities. The objectives for achieving this goal are fourfold.

- Obtain and disseminate directory and budget data on total Department technical information activity. (We used to worry about the growth of branch libraries. Now we are concerned with the proliferation of data bases.)
- Develop and implement policy for collecting and recording USDA-authored and USDA-issued publications and reports.
- Offer orientation and training on information activities to Departmental staff.
- Develop and promulgate a standard format for transmission of bibliographical records in machine-readable form.

A second vital goal is the creation of a technical information service network:

- Create and operate a coordinated USDA network of field and branch libraries and technical information

service points, information analysis centers such as an Emergency Information Center.

- Create an on-line system for shared indexing to be used by all Department elements who undertake a significant amount of indexing.
- Make available, equitably throughout the Department, on-line retrospective searches from the NAL and other USDA data bases such as the Current Research Information System (CRIS). (Incidentally, many of you may know NAL's data base by its acronym CAIN - Cataloging and Indexing. On July 1, we changed the acronym to AGRICOLA - for Agricultural on-line access. We do not mind if you pronouce it in the American way Agri-cola.)
- Extend to a significant number of Department administrators and researchers the ability to build and access personalized data bases on-line.
- Offer Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services equitably to all Department researchers.
- Develop and offer a service for translating foreign research publications on demand.

Thirdly, NAL needs to become an effective backstop for national agricultural information needs to:

- Create an efficient, fully automated system for management information in the Library, and for automated library processes.

- Build the very best all around collection of agricultural and related sciences materials, relating to research needs, and in coordination with LC, NLM, the land-grant, and our field libraries.
- Use the land-grant libraries to assist in acquisitions for NAL -- designate and support library resource centers at land-grant libraries.
- Store and preserve agricultural library materials at NAL and elsewhere. Utilize cooperative storage.
- Support land-grant libraries in microfilming the agricultural publications of their states.
- Microfilm USDA publications systematically.
- Build an extensive, highly useful data base of citations to agricultural literature, by merging records from other machine-readable files with NAL inhouse indexing.

The fourth goal looks toward building a coordinated National Agricultural Information Service Network:

- Provide high capability to locate library materials held at NAL, or elsewhere, through a national data base on-line at the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC).
- Extend the regionalized document delivery system nationwide, using all of the land-grant university libraries.
- Utilize delivery from cooperative storage and other sites: including Center for Research Libraries (CRL) and Universal Serials and Book Exchange (USBE).

. Encourage nationwide on-line access to AGRICOLA for retrospective search and SDI, providing small grants to land-grant universities for testing the quality and utility of the data base.

. Develop course syllabi, training, and user manuals and other aids to using NAL services. Offer extensive on- and off-site programs for orienting agricultural librarians to NAL services.

Finally, there is need to coordinate international technical information activities in agriculture.

. NAL is developing a strong voice and well-funded participation in the United Nations-FAO International Agricultural Information System (AGRIS).

. Developing expertise and policy positions with regard to international agricultural information activities, establishing NAL as the lead agency for the United States in these affairs.

. Encouraging the State Department, the Agency for International Development (AID), National Academy of Science, and the National Science Foundation to support us in these efforts toward coordination.

. To cooperate fully with organizations from other countries such as the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau (CAB), processing agricultural information capabilities of potential use to NAL users.

. Finally we have a responsibility to serve as a training laboratory for both national and international agricultural libraries, and to contribute to the state of the art. With that in mind, we shall soon assume editorial responsibility for the Quarterly Bulletin of the International Association for Agricultural Librarians and Documentists (IAALD).

This then is NAL's strategy for moving ahead -- our piece of the national library action.

As I lead NAL through this next decade, I am always mindful of those distinguished librarians, members of the Association, who passed it on to me.

I think of Foster Mohrhardt who struggled and finally saw built one handsome, functional building. I think of him also as I go about the world and see the respect for NAL that he generated among international librarians.

I think of John Sherrod who pushed us into the world of automation.

I think of Ralph Shaw who developed the centralized library that is now housed in our new building. I used to come to conferences, such as this one, and stand in awe of Shaw. I have an idea that he would be amused to know that only a few weeks ago one of the USDA old-timers came in and scolded me roundly about some books Shaw had taken from him and placed in the central library.

These, all my contemporary directors, and those who went ahead of em, are the American librarians who have enabled me to come before you today, in this bicentennial year, and assure you that NAL is indeed moving ahead.